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ABSTRACT

This document presents findings from a 5-year study of the effect of the standards-based reform movement on students with disabilities. The study used pragmatic evaluation strategies that integrated both quantitative and qualitative collection methods of data and site visits to 10 high schools in six districts (including urban, rural, and suburban districts) and three states. Findings addressed three main issues: first, the extent to which students with disabilities are included in standards-based reform; second, factors that affect the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reform; and third, interactions among special education programs and policies with district- and school-based reform efforts. The report offers seven major recommendations which address: (1) the Individualized Education Plan as the basis for decision making regarding inclusion; (2) development of a decision-making matrix by states and districts; (3) teacher training in the philosophy of inclusion; (4) ongoing professional development on integration of standards with curricula; (5) experimentation with interdisciplinary models of instruction; (6) certification standards that include content-specific course work; and (7) role of administrators as instructional leaders. (Contains 67 references.) (DB)

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The Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform

May 2000

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Reforming High School Learning: The Effect of the Standards Movement on Secondary Students with Disabilities

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The Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform

May 2000

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Executive Summary

Standards-Based Reform and Students with Disabilities

This document contains the findings from a five-year study conducted by the Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform (the Center). The Center is a partnership of three entities: the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), the Consortium for Policy Research (the Consortium) at the University of Pennsylvania, and the Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children (the Institute) at the University of Maryland.

In the last two years of the study, the Center shifted the investigation to the location of reforms: classrooms, schools, and districts. Much research (Berman and McLaughlin, 1974; McLaughlin, 1987) focuses on how local districts achieve state or federal policy. The research consistently characterizes implementation of top-down policies as mutual adaptation. That is, both the policy or program *and* the organization change because of the implementation process. State-level policies must be negotiated and adapted during restructuring efforts initiated at a local level. Furthermore, implementation strategies must support the local capacity and resource demands. State-based reform research has highlighted how the states' culture influences policy development and implementation (O'Day and Smith, 1993; Timar and Kirp, 1988). Program delivery at the district or school levels is a major unknown factor in understanding how general and special education reforms interact.

As discussed above, reform must consider the organizational level and structure of the schools. Findings presented in this report emerge from the study of ten high schools in six districts. There is a dearth of literature on the change or reform process in secondary schools; most literature focuses on the elementary school level. Effective elementary schools and secondary schools, specifically high schools, share some common elements, such as clear goals, a positive and orderly school culture, active and supportive administrators, and dedicated teachers who collaborate. However, the emphasis or focus on specific elements distinguishes elementary schools from high schools. Leithwood (1987) found that high schools, more than elementary schools, accomplish the following:

1. Pursue a broader range of goals;

2. Are more concerned about developing a sense of community and affiliation within the school;

3. Attribute more importance to the job satisfaction, employment status, verbal skills, and attendance rate of teachers;

4. Require administrators to consider a broader array of factors in school, in order to exercise influence;

5. Must address problems related to size of staff and student body more explicitly;

6. Require more school-level decision-making discretion;

7. Expend more effort on program design that is useful for all students and addresses a more diverse set of student needs;

8. Must promote and support more precise, concrete talk among teachers concerning classroom practices; and

9. Have less need for close parent involvement.

Secondary schools also have more structural and normative barriers than elementary schools. Issues such as departmentalization, teacher autonomy, physical isolation, and size make solutions and change more complex. Since much of the literature on school reform and improvement focuses on the elementary schools, these elements often are not considered. Moreover, reform strategies at the elementary level often present significant problems when generalizing findings to the high school level. As Fullan (1990) contends:

> Classroom and school-wide innovation plans appear more to make sense at the elementary level. But this is deceptive in that it diverts primary attention away from fundamental institutional improvement and toward more superficial changes. This has obscured the importance of institutional development at the elementary as well as the secondary level, as findings on the elementary level . . . have been extrapolated to high schools.

Methodology

This study used pragmatic evaluation strategies that integrated both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (Green, Caracelli, and Graham, 1989). The main advantage of this integration is its triangulation of data. Triangulation involves redundant measurement of the same phenomenon through two or more independent measurement routes, or multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1994). Data sources for this evaluation included:

- Review of district-level special and general education documents (e.g., standards, mission statements, handbooks), and

- Sites visits to districts to conduct more in-depth interviews with staff, review relevant documentation, and visit and observe classes in high schools implementing standards with students with disabilities. During each site visit, face-to-face interviews also were conducted with the district superintendent or his/her designee, special education director, principal, and assistant principal, school-based special education coordinator, and special education and general education teachers.

High schools were studied in three states, and within the three states, six districts and ten high school were studied. The districts included two large diverse urban districts; two rural, racially homogeneous districts; and two rural/suburban school districts with a high degree of student cultural diversity.

Findings

The findings illustrate more than the impact of standards-based reform on students with disabilities. Rather, the findings present larger issues confronted by teachers and administrators on a daily basis in high schools across the country. The issues are not always specific to students with disabilities or others with special needs but illustrate the complexity of challenging the status quo and making high schools a thoughtful place to educate young adults.

Three research topics provided a framework for addressing the conclusions. The research topics include the following:

- Determining the extent to which students with disabilities are included in standards-based reform;
- Ascertaining the factors that impacted the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reform; and
- Studying interactions between special education programs and policies with district- and school-based reform efforts.

We viewed the first two topics as precursors to the third topic—interaction between special education programs and policies with district reform efforts. However, we found little evidence to support the third topic. Thus, one of the major conclusions that emerged from the findings is the following:

There is a lack of interaction between special education programs and policies with district- and school-based reform efforts. Most state-level reforms do specify that ***all*** students will be part of reform efforts. However, few states and districts provide schools with guidelines about aligning standards with the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) of a student with disabilities.

Given this conclusion, we present only conclusions that pertain to the first two research topics. However, before proceeding, another overarching conclusion must be made:

Several factors associated with high schools, as we know them, greatly inhibited the capacity and collaboration among special and general education teachers to include students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum and related assessments. These factors—the departmental structure, subject-matter focus, lack of professional development opportunities and activities, lack of common planning times, credit and graduation requirements, and course scheduling—placed limitations on the extent to which students with disabilities can access and benefit from a standards-based curriculum.

Below are the conclusions pertaining to the first two research topics.

Extent of Participation by Students with Disabilities in a Standards-Based Curriculum

1. General education teachers sometimes used state and district standards as a broad guide to instruction. Few teachers actually applied the standards to actual classroom instruction. Most often the teachers reverted to the content they are accustomed to and comfortable with teaching.

2. General education teachers varied in how they engaged students with disabilities in standards-based instruction.

3. Students with disabilities who were educated in the general education classroom were exposed to standards-based instruction more often than those who were educated in special education

environments. However, exposure did not necessarily mean that the students were more engaged in the instructional processes.

4. A limited number of special education teachers used the standards as a guide in special education environments.

5. Special education teachers tended to use the IEPs rather than the standards as a guide for instruction. Moreover, most IEPs were not aligned with the standards.

External and Internal Motivation of General and Special Educators to Include Students with Disabilities in Standards-Based Instruction

1. Both general and special educators neither were aware of nor perceived any formal ***personal*** consequences if a student fails to learn standards.

2. Motivation for helping students with disabilities learn standards was largely "teacher driven." That is, individual teachers in each school were motivated. This motivation was not a comprehensive or school-wide vision, belief, or motivation.

3. District- and statewide assessments, not the standards themselves, were what motivated teachers to help ***all*** students learn standards.

4. Districts and schools lacked explicit decision criteria for determining the extent to which students with disabilities participated in standards-based instruction and large-scale assessments.

5. Both general and special educators tended to have a "wait-and-see" attitude about exposing students with disabilities to and engaging them in standards-based instruction.

6. Most administrators and general and special education teachers in this study ***articulated*** that students with disabilities are best served in a standards-based curriculum in general education. However, they also believed that some students with disabilities (e.g., students with severe developmental delays, severe disabilities, and severe emotional disabilities) cannot learn standards.

7. Most schools in this study were more likely to offer a basic life skills curriculum—in a self-contained or resource room—rather than general education options for students with disabilities, except for those with mild learning disabilities or speech impairments. This was deeply rooted in traditional and historical philosophies as well as perceived support for or ability to provide standards-based instructions for students with disabilities.

Capacity Factors that Impact the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Standards-Based Reform

The organizational structure of high schools presented numerous challenges for including students with disabilities in standards-based reform. Challenges and barriers included limited course offerings, a lack of communication with teachers in other departments (including special education), and a lack of common expectations and grading policies. We identified five topics related to schools' capacity to include students with disabilities in standards-based reform: teacher knowledge and professional development, collaboration between general and special educators, resources, leadership, and contextual conditions.

Teacher Knowledge and Professional Development

1. General education teachers were aware of content standards, though their level of familiarity varied.

2. Special education teachers were less aware of standards. Teachers with some awareness had only a vague understanding of the standards and implications for the students that they taught.

3. Both special education and general education teachers lacked the ability to or knowledge of how to link a) pedagogy, b) standards, and c) content.

4. General educators lacked an understanding about instructional modifications and accommodations for students with disabilities.

5. While special educators knew more than general educators about modifications and accommodations, they did not have a working knowledge of how to accommodate instructional and learning modifications for standards.

6. Special educators lacked guidance about how to align IEPs with the standards.

7. There was a dearth of district- and school-wide professional development for both general and special educators regarding application of the standards-based instruction in the classroom and implications for students with disabilities. The high school subject area department was the major conduit for information about standards, especially in large high schools.

8. Teachers assumed leadership roles and often were catalysts for change in reform initiatives. These teachers often were involved at the district or state level in writing a new curriculum or helping design new assessment instruments.

Collaboration between General and Special Educators

1. The departmental structure in high schools inhibited collaboration between general and special education teachers. Often special education classes were physically located away from all general education classes.

2. Both special and general education teachers lacked the knowledge and skills to co-teach in a classroom. In some teaming situations, special education teachers perceived themselves as assuming the role of an instructional aide. Issues regarding content, delivery of instruction, and grading policies were unresolved and often resulted in fewer co-teaching or teaming situations.

3. General educators tended to regard special educators as lacking the knowledge and qualifications to teach content subjects in high schools.

4. Special education teachers, by and large, were not invited to departmental meetings and were not involved in school-wide discussions about standards.

5. External inclusion initiatives developed whole school and teacher capacity for collaboration between general and special education teachers to include students with disabilities in standards.

Resources

1. All teachers reported that time was among the major resources needed to reflect on the implications of the standards for students with disabilities and to develop the appropriate services and strategies to include these students in standards-based instruction.

2. General education teachers lacked in-class support to accommodate students with disabilities. When special educators were assigned to co-teach with general educators, the special educators were perceived, and functioned, as instructional assistants.

3. Instructional materials that focus on the content subjects were not designed for students with disabilities. Teacher guides that accompanied high school texts did not provide suggestions or accommodations for diverse learners. Moreover, special education teachers reported using discarded materials from general education.

Leadership

1. Turnover in district and school leadership restricted and limited sustained reform.

2. Most district and school leaders lacked a strong vision for most reform initiatives, including the role of students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum.

3. District and school leaders ***articulated*** support for including students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum. However, they often did not provide the resources, incentives, and organizational structure to implement promising practices that engage and apply standards to students with disabilities.

4. School leaders often acquiesced to external demands that did not focus on the needs of students and teachers in their respective schools.

5. Schools leaders who have an institutional vision for including all students in a standards-based curriculum clearly articulated that vision. Additionally, they promoted this vision by establishing and maintaining an organizational structure that does not segregate students with special needs, hiring teachers with a similar vision, providing them with appropriate and sufficient resources, providing moral support for the teachers, guiding them when asked, and allowing them to experiment and "do their job."

Contextual Conditions

1. Community and parental attitudes at times can be counterproductive to including students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum.

2. There were few service delivery models in high schools that facilitated inclusion and promoted the application of and engagement in standards for students with disabilities.

3. Students with disabilities from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds often had goals, values, and experiences that were different from those of Caucasian students. These students also had challenging learning problems. Developing strategies to cope with these issues often was not aligned with a standards-based curriculum or was a secondary priority for staff working with these students.

4. Large classes (e.g., 35–40 students) in high schools often included students with diverse learning, language, and social needs. Engaging these students in a standards-based curriculum was a challenge.

5. Large high schools inhibited the ability of teachers from different departments to communicate, collaborate, reach a consensus, and develop strategies to engage all students in a standards-based curriculum. Conversely, small or rural high schools offered more opportunities for teachers

to communicate and collaborate but had limited course offerings and resources to engage students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum.

Recommendations

It is important to maintain high expectations for students with disabilities. This must be balanced with providing the students with equal access to a standards-based curriculum. The recommendations provide guidelines that will help states, districts, and schools ensure that students with disabilities effectively participate in the standards-based curriculum.

Recommendation 1: The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) should be the tool for negotiating, reconciling, and determining the supports needed by students with disabilities to participate in a standards-based curriculum and the assessments that measure mastery of the curriculum.

Recommendation 2: To maximize the IEP as a vehicle for aligning student needs with a standards-based curriculum, states and districts should develop a decision matrix. The matrix will provide IEP teams, which include parents, with criteria to negotiate, reconcile, and determine the supports needed by students with disabilities to participate in a standards-based curriculum and related assessments.

Recommendation 3: Undergraduate and graduate training programs for general education teachers at all levels should include the philosophy of inclusion, and the pedagogical knowledge and strategies for teaching students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum.

Recommendation 4: An ongoing series of professional development activities should support the capacity of both general and special education teachers to integrate standards with curricula, develop activities and assessments that prepare students for large-scale assessments, and design accommodations and modifications for all students to maximize their participation in a standards-based curriculum. Additionally, the professional development activities should be school-based and facilitated by professionals based at the school who have assumed either formal or informal leadership roles in various reform initiatives. School-based professional development activities would ensure that both general and special educators participate and will serve to create a community of learners with a similar vision. Other recommendations for professional development activities include providing numerous, ongoing opportunities for teachers and administrators to a) reflect on and evaluate both school and classroom practices, b) engage in interdepartmental study groups, and c) design and maintain interdepartmental strategic planning teams.

Recommendation 5: Districts should experiment with models for organizing high schools as interdepartmental/interdisciplinary structures that bring general and special education teachers together. Special education teachers should be assigned to general education departments and encouraged to participate in all departmental activities side-by-side with their general education colleagues.

Recommendation 6: Teacher training institutions and state certification boards should consider certification for secondary special education teachers that includes content-specific course work and knowledge necessary for a standards-based environment. This will facilitate a) discussions and teaming arrangements with general education staff, and b) access for students with disabilities to a standards-based curriculum. These content requirements would supplement the

interdisciplinary nature of education and provide special educators the credibility to work with general educators as collaborative partners to benefit students with disabilities.

Recommendation 7: Central office and school-based administrators should strive for credibility as instructional leaders who understand the academic challenges of including all students, including those with disabilities, in a standards-based curriculum. Additionally, the administrators should develop a vision that includes high learning expectations for students with disabilities. This vision should be consistently communicated and promoted through curriculum offerings, grading policies, staffing patterns, resource allocations, informal and formal award structures, moral support, and opportunities and time for both general and special education teachers to discuss and reflect on issues related to standards and students with disabilities.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This report summarizes the findings from a five-year study conducted by the Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform (the Center). The Center is a partnership among three entities: the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), the Consortium for Policy Research (the Consortium) at the University of Pennsylvania, and the Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children (the Institute) at the University of Maryland.

In Years 1-3 of the study, the Center focused on describing and analyzing interactions among federal, state, and local standards-based education reform policies and programs and their implications for students with disabilities. Findings include the following:

1. Standards developed at the state level often did not consider students with disabilities;

2. Teachers believe that new instructional strategies and performance assessments suit and benefit students with disabilities;

3. The rate of collaboration between general and special education teachers is increasing, although slowly;

4. Curricula for students with disabilities focus more on academics now than was the case in the past;

5. The demands to cover complex topics and thinking skills present challenges for teachers and students, including special education teachers and students with disabilities;

6. Efforts to help students with disabilities achieve standards vary greatly across districts and schools;

7. Assessment is a potent force in driving change toward the standards;

8. Teachers find it difficult to learn new standards and assessment paradigms;

9. Teachers are concerned about teaching to the test although the test may provide a good guide for instruction and content;

10. There is limited alignment of professional development and standards; and

11. State accountability systems may not hold districts and schools accountable for all

> students. For example, states and districts often specifically exclude students with disabilities from accountability measures. Performance reports may contain only the aggregated scores for the entire school or district, thereby masking the low performance or failures of a particular subgroup (e.g., students with disabilities).

In the last two years of the study, the Center shifted the investigation to the location of reforms—classrooms, schools, and districts. Much research (Berman and McLaughlin, 1974; McLaughlin, 1987) focuses on how local districts achieve state or federal policy. Implementing reforms at the district and school levels presents numerous challenges and requires priority-setting and strategic, long-term planning—all of which are challenging for teachers and students alike. Districts actively orchestrate state policies around local priorities and strategically interact with state measures to achieve local goals (Fuhrman, Clune, and Elmore, 1988). Many districts use state mandates as an opportunity to: a) pursue needed changes, b) develop higher standards and measures for improving performance, and c) design and implement their own reform initiatives. Therefore, the Center focused the study on the developmental nature of the implementation process down to the district and school levels. To do so, the focus of CPRE and the Institute remained at the elementary and middle school levels, while NASBE's research focus shifted to the high school level.

The Arcane High School

There is a dearth of literature on the change or reform process in secondary schools; most literature focuses on the elementary school level. As a result, many elements unique to high schools often are not considered in the school reform and improvement literature. Moreover, reform strategies at the elementary level often present problems when generalizing findings to the high school level. As Fullan (1990) contends:

> Classroom and schoolwide innovation plans appear more to make sense at the elementary level. But this is deceptive in that it diverts primary attention away from fundamental institutional improvement and toward more superficial changes. This has obscured the importance of institutional development at the elementary as well as the secondary level, as findings on the elementary level . . . have been extrapolated to high schools.

All schools can be viewed as formal organizations, sociocultural systems, and workplaces. Effective schools share some common elements such as clear goals, a positive and orderly school culture, active and supportive administrators, and dedicated teachers who collaborate. However, the emphasis or focus on specific elements distinguishes elementary schools from high schools. Leithwood (1987) found that high schools, more than elementary schools, accomplish the following:

1. Pursue a broader range of goals;
2. Are more concerned about developing a sense of community and affiliation within the school;
3. Attribute more importance to job satisfaction, employment status, verbal skills, and attendance rate of teachers;
4. Require administrators to consider a broader array of factors in school in order to exercise influence;
5. Must address problems related to size of staff and student body more explicitly;

6. Require more school-level decision-making discretion;

7. Expend more effort on program design that is useful for all students and addresses a more diverse set of student needs;

8. Must promote and support more precise, concrete talk among teachers concerning classroom practices; and

9. Have less need for close parent involvement.

High schools have more structural and normative elements than elementary schools, which further muddles reform efforts. Issues such as departmentalization, teacher autonomy, physical isolation, and size make solutions and change more complex. The subject matter department, as the universal organizational structure of high schools, influences teacher interest in promoting reform, as a whole organization, that the school cannot provide. Studies (see Lipsitz, 1984; Metz, 1978) show that high school departments determine teachers' views of students, the students' capacity to succeed, and whether the teachers within that department assume a conservative or experimental view of curriculum and instruction.

High schools, more than elementary schools, are defined by subject-area expertise. The subject-area boundaries create the organizational structure of high schools. Each subject area, or department, functions as a subunit with different organizational structures, processes, relationships, values, and cultures. McLaughlin and Talbert (1990) contend that the subject area is the:

> primary nexus of high school teachers' professional training and identity and of their collegial relations inside and outside the school setting, and it is central to framing secondary school reform policies and initiatives. The subject area . . . represents an important conduit for out-of-school influences on conditions of work for secondary teachers.

Additional factors can constrain, encourage, or challenge the way high school teachers teach, and thus influence student outcomes. Such factors include supervision, discipline policies, poor communication between teachers and administrators, lack of opportunities for professional development, and lack of clear schoolwide goals (Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; Lourtie, 1975). These factors are embedded within the context of a high school and are important to effective teaching. Such things as choosing student goals and the materials and activities to achieve those goals are in turn embedded in these factors. Teachers must determine whether the curriculum is suitable for students, whether they are comfortable with teaching the curriculum, whether they have the knowledge and interest to teach the context, and whether the necessary materials are available.

McLaughlin and Talbert (1990) cited other factors, mainly dispositional, that impact how high school teachers feel about their work, which in turn affect teacher performance and student outcomes. These include willingness to consistently expend high effort; responsibility for responding to a wide range of student needs and student outcomes; excitement about sharing subject knowledge, as opposed to covering course content; and a belief that they are making a positive difference in students' growth and capacity.

Who We Studied

Our data collection efforts involved studying districts and high schools in three states. Six districts, representing settings from a continuum of urban and rural locations and

from a range of diversity, were studied in the three states. Each district was asked to select matching schools that represented their student population as a whole. We did not want exemplars, or schools facing greater than average difficulties in helping students learn. In each district, we requested that the schools have similiar enrollments and racial demography. Ten high schools were selected as data collection sites.

In each district and school we conducted face-to-face-interviews, reviewed relevant documentation, and observed classrooms. Interviewees included: district superintendent or designee, district director of special education, principals and vice principals, special education teachers, general education teachers, parents, and students. We developed case studies of each high school. The findings that emerged from the case studies are presented in Chapter 3. However, to better understand the implications of the findings, we also reviewed the context in which reform occurs at the district and school levels. The next chapter presents the contextual factors that affect the implementation of reforms at the high school level.

Chapter 2
Context of Reform

The current educational reform movement highlights a) the dynamic nature of reform, b) how reform initiatives interact with the contextual conditions present in schools, and c) how change, reform initiatives, and contextual conditions shape teachers' perceptions of their work, motivation, effort, and student outcomes. Understanding why and how these processes occur at the secondary level requires a brief discussion of the features of the reform movement in both general and special education.

General Education Reform Movement

An understanding of the features of the general education reform movement is essential for several reasons. First, special education programs operate within the context of the larger educational system, and special education policies and resources are influenced by larger system priorities. Second, as previously discussed, educational reforms change the context of classrooms, expectations, and challenges for both teachers and students. Often reforms in most states and districts focus on two major elements: content and performance standards, and assessment and accountability.

Standards

At the core of educational reform are the standards for what students need to know and how they are to perform specific processes. Hill and Crevola (1999) believe that standards-based education is a new phenomenon because of:

1. The degree of focus on and commitment to the goal of ensuring that all students achieve defined and challenging standards;
2. The coherence and depth of beliefs and understandings that underpin the response to standards; and
3. The rigor and sophistication with which every aspect of schools and school systems are examined, redesigned, and managed to ensure that high standards are achieved.

Generally, there are two types of standards: content standards and performance standards. Content standards define the subject matter, including specific skills and competencies considered important for students to learn. Performance standards specify the expected levels of learning for students at different grade levels.

Accountability and assessment

Accountability is a central feature of reform. States impose accountability on school systems through such measures as reporting student test scores, increasing standards for specific schools or district accreditation, and imposing sanctions and rewards based on student performance or assessments. Increased student accountability typically means increasing course requirements and linking test scores to grade promotion and high school graduation. Assessment reforms include increasing the number and type of tests used by states and districts for measuring student performance. These new assessment measures emphasize problem-solving ability or the application of new knowledge and skills in more authentic ways. The most popular performance assessments include writing samples, demonstrations, and portfolios. Media reporting of district or school test scores has resulted in a high-stakes testing frenzy. Some districts tie fiscal allocations and teacher merit raises to test scores. Increasing the stakes for teachers and schools often results in overzealous test preparation and teaching to the test (Walberg, Haertel, and Gerlach-Downie, 1997).

A growing skepticism is emerging about the emphasis on assessment and accountability. Linking accountability practices to fiscal concerns or achievement testing is viewed by critics as too limiting. Likewise, requiring one individual or group (e.g., teacher or school staff) to be accountable for the actions of another person (e.g., an individual student) or group (e.g., a class) is seen as too demanding (Frymier, 1997). Current assessment and accountability practices do not appear to be implemented incrementally in classrooms and schools; rather, a radical transformation is desired to obtain positive results on the assessments and to make schools, administrators, and teachers accountable for student outcomes. Alfie Kohn, educational expert and author, believes that the standards and accountability movement are "squeezing the life out of schools." He says that ". . . teachers have to carve out portions of their week to prep kids before they can get back to real learning" (O'Neel and Tell, 1999).

Special Education Reform

Traditionally, special education legislation has focused on compliance with the procedures for providing special services described in the federal and state laws. However, the philosophy and the mandates contained in the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) shifted that accountability to focus on how students are meeting the new standards, thus increasing expectations for students with disabilities (U. S. Department of Education, 1998). Given this new definition of accountability, IDEA exerts pressure on districts and schools to: include students with disabilities in state accountability systems; promote inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms; decrease inappropriate identification of students as disabled, particularly cultural or language minority students; and improve the educational results for these students receiving special education services.

Dearth of outcome data

Federal legislation is the foundation for measuring the learning outcomes for students with disabilities. However, the accountability measures for students with disabilities are less than optimal as a result of several factors:

> The exclusion of significant numbers of students with disabilities from both state and national data collection programs and/or the inconsistent or nonexistent disability-specific variables used to identify students in these data collection programs makes it all but impossible to use all the outcome information that is

currently available. In addition, although state goals encompass many important school completion outcome indicators, available state data collection programs only assess a limited number of these indicators [National Center on Educational Outcomes, 1995].

IDEA does mandate the collection of outcome data for students with disabilities. However, it is unclear whether the mandates include significant support to overcome the technical and political hurdles to extract useful data (McGrew, Algozzine, Spiegel, Thurlow, and Ysseldyke, 1993). Recently, data on the performance of students with disabilities on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), based on only 3,835 students with disabilities, indicate that these students do not perform as well as their non-disabled peers (U. S. Department of Education, 2000). Moreover, students with disabilities belonging to some racial/ethnic groups scored lower than white students with disabilities.

Challenges to Aligning General and Special Education Reforms

To ensure that students have meaningful experiences with the general education curriculum and instruction, it is necessary to plan and negotiate the alignment of the reforms in general education with special education. Existing policies and practices must be redefined and adapted to align both general and special education initiatives implemented in schools and classrooms. This challenge requires well-designed strategies to support students with disabilities and the teachers responsible for teaching them the standards.

Standards set the stage for creating a common language among general and special educators because they provide a set of clear expectations within a school and across grade levels. The standards also provide the impetus for establishing challenging goals for the students, and increasing and moving beyond expectations outlined in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Elements that support students with disabilities in the standards movement are: motivation, capacity, leadership, and competing reform initiatives. These elements interact to create a policy and an educational environment that is conducive to including students with disabilities in standards.

Motivation

Creating standards does not ensure that schools will teach standards to all students. Within schools, faculty and staff must have both internal and external motivation. Internal motivation encompasses personal values and beliefs that individuals use to determine what they want to accomplish. Individual teachers and administrators in schools have personal goals, beliefs, and values that motivate them to pursue a particular activity and that define their responsibility toward others (Abelmann and Elmore, 1999). The goals are shaped by cultural values, professional values, and community values (Louis, 1990) and may not focus on student learning. Rather, they are motivated by needing personal or financial security, pursuing professional growth and promotions, surviving the work week without confrontation, receiving group acceptance, or promoting and protecting particular political interests.

External motivation is acquired over time and is influenced by accumulated experiences, interaction with others, education, training, professional culture, and environment. Based on their values and beliefs, individuals create personal goals and perform subsequent actions to achieve those goals. For example, teachers may adopt goals shared by their peers and will commit to accomplishing goals shared by school authorities (Locke and Latham, 1990). Administrators and teachers often use personal goals to evaluate state, district, or school

standards (Ford, 1992). From this perspective, external standards and goals cannot be imposed on disbelieving practitioners.

Expectations and accountability systems. The assessments of the school district or the state are designed around standards and focus on measuring student performance through periodic assessments. External assessments are emerging as powerful influences on communicating (often dictating) to schools and teachers what students should learn. However, the state or district accountability systems, and formal or informal pressure, may:

> conflict with a teacher's own deeply embedded ideas of how a "real school" should operate and may cause considerable personal confusion as needed adjustments take place. . . . Teachers are asked to grapple with new instructional practices or with innovations such as reading in the content areas. As innovations come and go, teachers also may become disillusioned about the possibility of achieving enduring results from their investment in their performance and in improving education [Louis, 1990].

Encouraging and motivating teachers to accept responsibility for all student learning is critical (Roach, Dailey, and Goertz, 1997). Two issues are important in motivating an individual to include students with disabilities in external and internal accountability systems. First, accountability systems must clearly delineate ***who*** is responsible to ***whom*** for ***what*** (Raber and Roach, 1998). If that responsibility is not defined, is open to interpretation, or lacks a concrete definition, the system's power to motivate professionals and influence future action is significantly mitigated. External and internal accountability mechanisms that lack clear specifications and guidelines for including students with disabilities in standards do not send powerful signals to professionals. Most important is the lack of knowledge about or direction in using the assessment to inform the educational programs and the IEPs for students with disabilities.

Second, accountability systems vary in terms of consequences for students with disabilities. Consequences may be ***low stakes***, such as confidential communication of approval or disappointment. Accountability systems may include ***high stakes***, such as receiving public praise or criticism, or reconstituting a school based on low performance. Research on this topic is inconclusive. Specifically, the research lacks consensus on a) how individuals and schools respond to perceived consequences; b) if individuals are more responsive to individual or schoolwide consequences, or to rewards versus sanctions; c) the extent to which a highly structured high-stakes system may undermine teachers' capacity and school working conditions.

Capacity

Capacity describes the extent to which something can be achieved or produced, assuming a sufficient level of motivation is present (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1997; Raber and Roach, 1998). Within a school and a given classroom, a wide range of capacity issues can affect performance. Three major capacity factors may influence the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based classrooms: teacher knowledge and skills, time, and leadership.

Teacher knowledge and skills. The motivation to teach and the motivation to learn are closely linked and reflect teachers' response to four aspects of teaching at the secondary level:

1. The degree to which the multiple goals characteristic of a high school give direction and meaning to teachers' professional activity;

2. The age, number, and future prospects of students may influence the investment that teachers make in increasing their knowledge;

3. The collective norms of performance and improvement that other teachers share; and

4. The significance of departmental structures and teachers' traditional allegiances to subject-matter disciplines (Little, 1990).

The demand to hold all students to the new and rigorous content and performance standards creates a need for more intensive instruction. Specifically, teachers need to re-teach or reinforce concepts, emphasizing application rather than rote knowledge. To do so, teachers may need to modify how they teach and organize instruction. Modifying their strategies or implementing new learning and teaching strategies requires teachers to have a deep knowledge of both content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Content knowledge often is viewed as an essential prerequisite to helping students learn standards. Teachers with expertise in standards-based content are more successful in teaching standards (Cohen and Hill, 1998).

Teachers of students with diverse learning needs and disabilities must be familiar with the principles of universal design—that is, the design of instructional activities and materials—so that learning goals may be achieved by all students having wide differences in their abilities to see, hear, speak, move, read, understand English, attend, organize, engage, and remember (Orkwis and McLane, 1998). This may involve knowing how to modify instruction and design accommodations to help students.

Modification involves changing the content or performance expectations; for example, a student may be given a lower-level text or a shorter assignment. For students with disabilities who can master the materials without changing the content, accommodations may increase access and exposure to standards. Accommodations are tools such as word processors, tape recorders, or other assistive devices that may reduce barriers to engaging or participating in standards, without changing the level of the content. Accommodations such as using special technology and materials often help the student achieve success in the general education classroom.

Teachers need assistance designing accommodations and modifying the content instruction without applying lower standards and eliminating course content and requirements for students with disabilities. Additionally, teachers need support in helping students accomplish performance-based activities and effectively interacting in group situations.

Time. Perhaps the biggest barrier to implementing the standards in classrooms and schools is time (Louis and Kruse, 1995). Limited time is spent on competing demands for professional development, classroom activities, and communication across faculty. Time is needed to: a) conduct professional development about standards and promising practices for students with disabilities; b) develop a professional community that engages in reflective discussion about student issues; c) engage in common planning and other communication efforts between educators; and d) work with individual students or groups of students. Sizer (1992) presents an appropriate analogy between schools and hospitals, which provide:

> time during the school days for people to meet, schedules that allow the teachers and particular groups of youngsters to gather together, teachers committed to such gatherings, and school programs flexible enough to respond to adjustments recommended for each student. Schools

> should do no less for students than effective hospitals do for patients. Good hospitals allow time for staff consultations. They expect collaboration in the diagnosis of problems and the selection of remedies. Good hospitals consult patients carefully. Schools are not hospitals, and the school kids are not "sick," yet the analogies in this case hold.

Special education teachers face additional time-related challenges in this reform movement, which include:

- Helping students with disabilities learn the new content either in the general education classroom or within the context of a special education setting;
- Collaborating with general education teachers and other related services personnel;
- Balancing standards with other important skills that may be more functional and unique to the student;
- Designing strategies to address the social and emotional needs of students with disabilities;
- Completing IEPs and other federal, state, and district demands for documentation; and
- Aligning IEPs and the curriculum with the new standards or revising the organization and content of the curriculum.

Leadership

Effective schools research identifies strong leadership as a consistent hallmark of good schools. Wilson and Corcoran (1988) summarized the role of an effective leader in secondary schools:

> The leader's task is to develop a clear vision of the school's purpose, a vision that gives primacy to instruction, then to employ it consistently through frequent interactions. . . . Schools use bureaucratic linkages to create opportunities for teachers to act on that vision, and at the same time, use cultural linkages to ensure that the vision becomes part of the teachers' own professional culture.

In the high schools, especially those with large student populations, leaders may be those with the titles of principal, assistant principal, and department head. These leaders construct a school or department culture that impacts how and what students learn and provide the necessary resources and support to help both teachers and students. It is especially important for a department head to have credibility as an expert on issues related to subject-specific curriculum and instruction. Thus, an effective department head is not only a lead teacher, but must have credibility to facilitate discussions within and across departments to develop appropriate, action-oriented solutions.

School leaders can structure common staff agendas that bring teachers together in face-to-face communication on a frequent, ongoing basis. Examples include structured time for collaborative planning and reflection, faculty and staff study groups, interdepartmental teams, team teaching, special projects addressing common interests and needs, and, of course, professional development workshops (Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach, 1999; Louis and Kruse, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1992).

Competing Reform Initiatives

Another critical contextual issue is the wide range of competing reforms that limit school resources and often transfer energy and focus

away from standards (Fuhrman, 1993). The demands placed on teacher knowledge appear to be escalating as a result of standards-based reform. Complicating the emphasis on standards, too, is the push to implement other state- and district-related initiatives (e.g., early childhood literacy, site-based management, total quality management). These demands must be overcome to effectively teach standards to any student.

In most districts and schools, reconciling the differences among the competing reforms is work in progress. Moreover, states and districts differ in how they define and implement standards for what students should learn. Some are aligning standards with other initiatives, such as curriculum revision. Across the country, standards are being defined for traditional disciplines such as English, history, math, and science, or as multidisciplinary skills for thinking, problem-solving, communicating, and being a good citizen. This is often accompanied by introducing and training teachers on new curricular initiatives or district-wide assessments, which may or may not have the same focus as the standards.

Chapter 3

What We Learned

The findings presented in this section are drawn, in large part, from interviews with people from distinctive professional roles: school superintendents, associate superintendents, directors of special education, principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, general education teachers, and special education teachers. Implementing reforms at the district and school levels is an ongoing challenge for these professionals. We found that, by and large, both general and special education high school teachers in our study were not fully aware of or applying standards across the curriculum. As a result, only a portion of ***all the students*** in the study high schools were exposed to and engaged in standards in their classrooms. From our visits we found two major factors that contributed to this phenomenon:

1. There is a lack of interaction between special education programs and policies with district- and school-based reform efforts. Most state-level reforms do specify that ***all*** students will be part of reform efforts. However, few states and districts provide schools with clear and specific guidelines about aligning standards with the IEPs of students with disabilities.

2. High schools greatly inhibited the capacity and collaboration among special and general education teachers to include students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum and related assessments. A number of factors—the departmental structure, subject-matter focus, lack of professional development opportunities and activities, lack of common planning times, credit and graduation requirements, and course scheduling—placed limitations on the extent to which students with disabilities can access and benefit from a standards-based curriculum.

We also pinpointed other factors that complicated decision-making and challenged administrators, teachers, and the students themselves. These factors greatly affected the degree to which students with disabilities were engaged in standards-based reform:

- Teachers' awareness of the standards;
- Motivation to participate in standards-based reform;
- Knowledge about strategies to apply and engage students with disabilities in standards;

- Collaboration among special and general educators;
- Available resources; and
- Leadership.

The findings present a rather bleak picture of what is occurring in high schools. However, we found several promising practices in the schools, most often occurring among individual teachers and administrators, not schoolwide. The practices are presented throughout this document and highlight the motivation, dedication, and exemplary efforts of individuals to ensure that all students are engaged in a standards-based curriculum. Moreover, these practices provide insight into how high school teachers' and administrators' philosophies and strategies facilitate positive outcomes for all students.

Teachers' Awareness of the Standards

General and special education exposure to, and knowledge about, standards differs. Special education teachers are less aware than most teachers of the standards. In the ten districts, the extent of general and special education knowledge of standards by high school teachers varied. Teachers and administrators acknowledged the need for continuous staff development and time to design classroom activities and strategies to align standards for ***all*** students. Administrators quickly pointed out that access to professional development was not equitable among all teachers. They claimed that elementary and middle schools participated in more standards-based professional development activities than high school teachers did:

> I'm jealous of the in-services in the elementary and middle schools. They have content standards coming out of their pores. We've been more on our own. It's really individual teachers and departments who are looking at those standards, but there needs to be more infusion.
>
> *—High school principal*

Information about standards was disseminated through written materials, district and school workshops, schoolwide meetings, departmental discussions, and the general media. The most popular of these sources were workshops, which were usually sponsored by the state or the district. However, these workshops were characterized as "hit or miss." Many workshops were brief, providing only an overview of the standards. The connection or alignment between the standards and the curriculum was not made by the workshop presenters. Corresponding pedagogies for teaching the standards were secondary topics. Thus, many teachers reported that they often left workshops more confused than before and without a thorough understanding of how to align the standards, curriculum, and teaching strategies.

> We haven't had real in-service on standards; most is lip service. Teachers are on their own. Teachers look at the standards-based curriculum, realize they don't have time to teach everything, and they just do a 15-minute lecture so they can say they did it. Teachers here determine the curriculum in their classrooms. So, without meaningful training, you don't have consistency from teacher to teacher.
>
> *—General education teacher*

> Someone from the state department came to talk about the standards. She talked 80 miles per hour and teachers were wondering what she was talking

about. She knew the terminology and she was throwing out "strand this, strand that, standards this, standards that," and she said "do this and do that." We had a few other workshops that have helped us with it.

—*Special education teacher*

Special education teachers were less aware of standards. Those with some awareness had only a vague understanding of the standards and implications for their students. Special educators believed that general educators received more structured time to learn about standards through district workshops and through departmental discussions and mentoring. Teachers report that they learn about standards through their own initiative, not through mandated district or school meetings.

> District in-service went to half a day. It's all content standards. It's all for new teachers. All regular education went, but my principal let me go because I said "I'm going." My department head [special education] didn't even know. In other departments, somebody will mentor a person in the department. You don't mentor somebody in another department.
>
> —*Special education teacher*

Special education teachers reported not being taken seriously when they attended district-sponsored workshops that included both general and special educators.

> The in-services do not include anyone who knows about students with disabilities. It's unreal to me. They responded to the general education teachers in a serious and helpful way. No one can answer questions about students with disabilities.
>
> —*Special education teacher*

Motivation to Participate in Standards-Based Reform

Motivation to apply the new standards was inconsistent. Teachers with many years of experience and those using traditional instructional strategies often had fewer and lower expectations for incorporating the standards into their instruction. This expectation was often shared by principals.

> The board adopts them [the new curricula] and they have been disseminated to teachers. It's a mix at this point. I don't expect my 20-year veteran home economics teacher to convert completely. She is in the process, she has access to it, she chooses. I expect the new teachers to follow the new curricula closely and rigorously. I won't particularly impose it on a teacher who's been doing a good job for 15 years. To them, this is a new trend that I am asking them to run with. But, they do it enough to satisfy the state requirements—yes, we use the new curriculum.
>
> —*High school principal*

District and statewide assessments, not the standards themselves, were the major stimuli that motivated teachers to help ***all*** students learn standards. Many teachers and administrators did not view assessment and accountability systems as lasting measures. Neither were they aware of, nor did they perceive, any formal ***personal*** consequences if a student fails to learn standards.

> This district is as loose as a goose. There is no real accountability on anything.
>
> —*High school principal*

Moreover, many teachers and school-based administrators felt that reforms, standards, and assessments come and go, and they believed that there was a lack of accountability, whether formal or informal.

One thing about reform, most people have been around long enough to say, "Wait it out, it will go away, this too shall pass." That's the attitude many teachers have because leaders here do not follow through and there is no accountability.

—General education teacher

Nobody is really holding us to the standards. There is a perception that, "these are the standards, do with them what you will." We've had so many. We had something similar . . . a few years ago. . . . We made jokes about it. Well, nothing ever happened, and now it's something else.

—General education teacher

not a comprehensive or schoolwide vision or belief. For example, one department created an accountability system, but was frustrated by the lack of standardization across the whole school.

> Our department is trying to create tests or our own exit exams to measure student learning for all students and see if we meet those standards and if students leave our programs with this knowledge. That's not going on at the district level. You're getting little bits and pieces of people trying to do something for one goal. How do you get continuity? I think that's really important in terms of accountability.
>
> *—General education teacher*

A Cohesive Professional Community

The science department in a large, diverse high school developed a cohesive professional community that engaged in frequent group discussions and reactions to standards. Individual teachers, not the department chair, motivated the others. These individuals assumed an active role in learning about standards and stimulating interest and discussion among their departmental colleagues. The teachers are characterized by the principal as "high-powered teachers, who are raising their peers to high standards." The whole department is learning state standards and establishing their own benchmarks.

> In our department we have a chart with all the [district] standards, and we make sure that portions of our curriculum are meeting [the standards]. Little bullets on the chart, comparisons, what do we have, where are we supposed to be, what can we do. We meet at the end of the year to go over the curriculum.
>
> *—General education teacher*

Motivation for using the standards was largely "teacher driven." The high school department was the major conduit for information about standards, especially in large high schools. That is, individual departments or teachers in each school were motivated, but that motivation was

Additionally, teachers assumed leadership roles and were catalysts for change in reform initiatives. These teachers often were involved at the district or state level in writing a new curriculum or designing new assessment instruments.

Knowledge about Strategies to Apply and Engage Students with Disabilities in Standards

The degree to which general and special education teachers apply standards to all students varies. General education teachers, more than special education teachers, apply and use standards in their classrooms. General education teachers sometimes use state and district standards as a broad guide to instruction. Few teachers actually apply the standards to classroom instruction. Most often, teachers revert to the content they are accustomed to and comfortable with teaching. We found that most professional development activities about the standards failed to focus on how to align the standards and the curriculum. Many teachers are challenged because alignment among standards, curricula, and pedagogy was not seamless.

Both general and special educators cited a lack of the skills needed to teach standards to any student, much less those with disabilities. Many teachers were learning as they go along.

> Right now I do not feel prepared to teach standards—period. I mean, as a general guide, yes. But when I look at the standards I do not make the necessary leap to action. How do I change my teaching to help the kids learn this? I'm not making that connection. For those with disabilities, without the supports from special education in the classroom, I'm really lost.
>
> *—General education teacher*

> There is a barrage of things . . . but the big issue is how do we adjust our teaching to these standards, or are we adjusting the standards to our teaching?
>
> *—General education teacher*

This issue of what to teach and when and where to teach it is compounded when a student has an IEP. Districts and schools lacked explicit decision criteria for determining the extent to which students with disabilities participated in standards-based instruction and large-scale assessments. Special education teachers told us that they receive no guidance about how to align IEPs with the standards. Special education teachers tended to use the IEPs rather than the standards as a guide for instruction. Moreover, most IEPs were not aligned with the standards. Districts were slowly modifying IEP forms that include criteria for determining the extent of student involvement in standards.

> We're revising our whole IEP form. We're trying to create a form that will help teachers address all the issues. We will provide cues on the form. That way, teachers can at least ask the question about the appropriateness of the standards for a particular student.
>
> *—Special education director*

Furthermore, the lack of guidance complicates decision-making about the extent to which students with disabilities who participate in the general education classroom should be engaged in standards-based learning.

> We keep asking questions about the students with IEPs, but nobody has answers. It concerns me. The assessments and the whole focus on standards and literacy raise the bar for these students. Really, we are talking about how to fold standards into our teaching. But I am particularly concerned about how we will do that for students with disabilities.
>
> *—Special education teacher*

Most administrators and general and special education teachers who we spoke to ***said*** that

Visible Special Educators

In several high schools, communication with other faculty does occur both within ***and*** across departments. This fostered good social relations between general and special education teachers. Despite feeling overwhelmed, special education teachers in this school reported being a viable part of the school. Both the teachers and the principal from this high school believed that this enhanced their relationships with general educators.

> The special education faculty are all over the school. They conduct lunchtime study halls, serve on committees, attend general education department meetings, work in general education classes, sponsor extracurricular activities that involve all the students, and coach athletics. People see them as part of the school. That does a lot of good in bringing them into the school as partners.
>
> —*High school principal*

most students with disabilities should learn standards. However, we found that expectations for applying the new standards and curriculum were inconsistent. Students with disabilities educated in the general education classroom were exposed to standards-based instruction more often than those receiving instruction in special education environments. However, exposure did not necessarily mean that the students were more engaged in the instructional processes.

Upon closer examination, we found that general educators lacked an understanding about instructional modifications and accommodations for students with disabilities. Special educators, on the other hand, knew more than general educators about modifications and accommodations. However, special educators did not have a working knowledge of the content taught in high school classes, or how to accommodate instructional and learning modifications for a standards-based curriculum. This lack of knowledge led to inconsistently engaging students with disabilities in standards within the district, schools, and classes.

Collaboration among Special and General Educators

Given the unique knowledge and experiential base that general and special educators independently possess, collaboration appears to be a viable strategy. We found that the departmental structure in high schools inhibited collaboration between general and special education teachers. Often special education classes were physically located away from all general education classes.

Both special and general education teachers lacked the knowledge and skills to co-teach in a classroom. In some teaming situations, special education teachers perceived themselves as assuming the role of an instructional aide. Issues regarding content, delivery of instruction, and grading policies were unresolved and often resulted in fewer co-teaching or teaming situations. General educators tended to believe that special educators did not have the subject matter expertise of many secondary teachers. Special education faculty with degrees in a subject matter often had more positive teaming experiences. Conversely, special education

teachers described being treated as "aides" whenever collaboration occurred. One special education teacher said, "The teacher I teamed with didn't believe in inclusion; he constantly told me that we [special educators] didn't belong in his room."

Many general educators believed they were incapable of helping students with disabilities achieve standards and expected outcomes. However, general education teachers admitted lacking the knowledge and skills necessary to design and use accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities. Moreover, general educators often did not know if a student had an IEP or the implications of the IEP for teaching and learning standards. Both special educators and general educators

It Takes Work to Collaborate

Teachers in schools without external initiatives also collaborate. One special educator from a large high school established a teaming partnership with an algebra teacher. The teachers admitted that they had similar philosophies and values—they both wanted students to learn the concepts any way they can. Moreover, these teachers had a division of labor. The algebra teacher did all the planning and the special educator designed and implemented all accommodations. The dialogue among the special educator (SE) and the teacher (AT) illustrates how the successful collaboration occurred over time and that mutual trust and energy is needed to foster and maintain the partnership.

> ***SE:*** At first it was a very strange atmosphere in the classroom. They weren't a class, but they were a bunch of individuals. Then we worked it out so that the kids would help each other, so that it wasn't always the two of us helping.
>
> ***AT:*** It really works out because I want to push them, and she tends to want to slow them down a little bit. We balance each other out really well.
>
> ***SE:*** Every now and then, the two of us have to have a pow-wow!
>
> ***AT:*** There is a lot of team-building between us and between the kids. They now come into the class looking happy.
>
> ***SE:*** We have to do a lot of communicating. One of us will say: "They aren't getting it, we need to change this." Then one of us will suggest another way to teach the concept. There's a lot of that; the big thing is communicating.

At another high school, one special educator talks about how she also worked out a collaboration with another teacher:

> Occasionally, I'll sneak down and watch the students with disabilities do oral presentations in English and help them. The teacher sort of sees me as a team teacher in the class. That's just because we go back several years, we know each other really well, and so we have done this on our own.
>
> *—Special education teacher*

empathized with each other's time constraints and the paperwork burden placed on special educators. General education teachers viewed the paperwork associated with special education as the only communication medium between them and special educators:

> I would prefer to have a special education teacher come in and hang out and say "let's talk," but I just get paperwork. I'd like to see them [special education teachers] approach us first before they put students in our class. They could say, "how about taking this person?" It would be nice if I had a little bit of input here, a chance to talk with the student and teacher. That would help determine the student's level, and what I can do to help them. I would like to know what the danger is. I know it's hard to do that in one or two meetings.
>
> —*General education teacher*

Closely related to appropriate teacher knowledge and skills was the availability of certified teachers. A principal from a rural district explained the recruitment and retention issues faced by the district:

> We recruited two teachers. The lead special education teacher was an early childhood specialist, got secondary certification, and has done well. The second special educator was recruited while substituting. She's fair—it is not easy to find special educators. The shortage is critical, our salary scale is low, and we don't pay bonuses as do neighboring school districts. I'd like to see the salary scale revised because this behind-doors, under-the-table negotiation is frustrating. We have candidates who also interview in three other districts. We offer the $24,000 salary, but the other districts offer a $5,000 bonus. We're out of the picture. We can't compete. To make things worse, we lost our best teacher to a national project. She's a teacher trainer, which helps the whole system but does not help us.

Another principal at an urban school district reported losing 40 to 50 percent of his teachers. As in many parts of the country, this district faced critical personnel shortages in special education. He cited three problems that resulted from generally low salaries, high turnover rates, and personnel shortages:

> First, the school can't develop and sustain staff who are knowledgable about the reform initiatives impacting students with disabilities. Second, we hire staff who often are not certified or highly skilled. Third, it was increasingly difficult for faculty to develop and maintain social and professional relationships.

Available Resources

Resources can facilitate or hinder teachers' capacity to effectively implement standards for students with disabilities, regardless of their motivation and skills. Time was an extremely critical issue for all teachers. Both general and special educators talked about trade-offs in the use of time and felt overwhelmed by class schedules and a general lack of planning time. This restricted time was devoted to differentiating instruction and designing modifications and accommodations to help students with disabilities learn the standards. Trade-offs often bred resentment. Some general educators criticized special education departments for focusing on their own classroom activities and paperwork and ignoring or not assisting students in general education classes. General educators resented that the special educators often did not notify them about students with

disabilities enrolled in their classes, inform them about the learning characteristics of specific disabilities, or suggest accommodations for students with disabilities.

In turn, special educators talked about balancing time for their own classes with enormous paperwork demands, such as the IEPs. In most districts, the IEP forms have doubled in number due in large part to IDEA mandates. Ten to twelve page IEPs are the norm for most students. Completing the paperwork and conducting IEP meetings leave little time for collaborating and planning with other teachers.

> A special educator's planning time is consumed with special education-related matters such as evaluations, screening materials, and parent information meetings. I teach six classes a day. I don't have time to sit with six classroom teachers 30-60 minutes a week.
>
> *—Special education teacher*

School administrators were not perceived to be encouraging or arranging common planning time and other vehicles that permit general and special educators to plan together. In one school, a request submitted by a general educator and special educator for a joint planning period was denied. These teachers claimed that the school administrators were afraid to experiment and "rock the boat." In

The Power of External Initiatives

External initiatives developed the capacity of teachers and of the whole school for full inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reform in a small rural high school. These initiatives provided resources to hire external consultants to work with the staff continuously over a two- or three-year period. This long-term activity was cited as a critical step in fostering schoolwide collaboration that supported the concept of providing a common curriculum for all students in general education classes.

> If we are all in discussions together, special educators can share information about the students with disabilities. There have been times in the classroom where the teaming has worked out in a great way. They learn from us, and we learn from them, and it all works out best for the kids.
>
> *—Special education director*

The sessions provided the opportunity for the general and special education teachers to develop both instructional and assessment instruments and strategies.

> The special education teacher and I consult each other in making the modifications. Many of my tests are matching and multiple-choice and short-answer; therefore, I modify multiple-choice questions by crossing out one or two of the four choices. For matching I do something similar. That's a standard modification for the majority of my special needs students. Other modifications may include shortening assignments or giving the students more time. This is an established pattern. Much of it is just talking to each other and making decisions based on how the kids are working.
>
> *—General education teacher*

another school, the school principal wanted to decrease teachers' time commitments. He discouraged all teachers from participating in an excessive number of committees and school events. This created a potential clash with other efforts designed to foster schoolwide communication across different groups and to encourage individuals to maximize time for instruction.

Most general education teachers talked about their frustration with the lack of support for their work with students with disabilities. As previously stated, most general educators supported, albeit in principle, inclusion as the optimal vehicle for helping students with disabilities learn standards.

Most schools in the study provided a continuum of services for students with disabilities. The continuum of services permitted many students with disabilities to receive their education in the general classroom. However, most special educators spent time with other students in self-contained or resource room placements, leaving students in general education classes without supports. It was no surprise that many general education teachers believed that inclusion was an inadequate service delivery model lacking sufficient support for both the students with disabilities and the general educator. Without adequate and appropriate supports, many general educators contended that students with disabilities would be more effectively served in the smaller, self-contained special education classes.

Another point of frustration among teachers was the lack of such resources in the school. Both general and special education teachers in the study criticized existing school texts and other materials as inadequate for working with many of their students with disabilities. Schools lacked the basic materials and texts that were developmentally and cognitively appropriate for the students. Instructional materials that focus on the content subjects were not designed for students with disabilities. Teacher guides that accompanied high school texts did not provide suggestions or accommodations for diverse learners. Moreover, special education teachers reported using discarded materials from general education.

> My students have the most severe behavior problems. Their personalities are such that it's hard to do group instruction. It is frustrating because the vast majority of my materials are designed for group instruction. These materials are hand-me-downs from general education. I try to individualize instruction. In one class I may have six different lessons going on simultaneously with materials designed for a group.
>
> *—Special education teacher*

Leadership

In the last 20 years, research has shown that effective leadership was an integral, if not the most important, component in successful school reform.

We found that most district and school leaders lacked a strong vision for most reform initiatives, including the role of students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum. District and school leaders ***articulated*** support for including students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum. However, their staff contended that the resources, incentives, and organizational structure needed to implement promising practices to engage and apply standards to students with disabilities were not provided. Rather, the administrators acquiesced to external demands that did not focus on the needs of students and teachers in their respective schools. These demands most often came from district offices.

A Principal's Strategies for an Inclusive Vision

The principal of a large, culturally diverse high school offered four key strategies for how he sets into motion his vision for enabling all students to learn: a) locate special education classrooms throughout the building, not in one wing or corridor, b) match students with disabilities with the appropriate general education teachers who will do everything possible to help the students learn, c) hire teachers who truly believe and practice the philosophy that all students will learn, and d) provide the resources to promote the vision.

> It is an institutional aura and expectation that we have of all adults, kids, and our jobs. The acceptance, nurturing, and the belief system have really grown a great deal. That is why we are seeing success with all our students. You gotta believe, and then you get the right people in the right places with the right resources so that they can do their jobs. You get out of their way, support them when they need it, provide insights when you can. It works. I've seen the improvements, the growth and positive experiences that we have had in the last four years.
>
> *—High school principal*

> The school is like an open door for the latest reform initiative. We are always in the business of doing one trendy reform after another. The reforms come from the district. The principal here never says "no." No backbone. Always "yes," but never with the professional development and supports needed.
>
> *—Guidance counselor*

Principals admitted difficulty trying to balance reform and demands from others outside and within the school. A principal, perceived by teachers as a credible leader, articulated an interest in supporting students with disabilities. He was very supportive of inclusion but was frustrated with the internal school structures needed to maintain inclusive classrooms. For example, critics of the principal described him as a credible leader who was spread too thinly. He was not strategically focused on school problems, but tried to do everything. Thus, he was not sufficiently attentive to any particular issue for a sustained period.

> This is a big school with so much diversity. Either you quit, or you give up and just live for the weekend, or you decide to make a difference in small ways. You can't change a school like this quickly, and you're never going to be able to make all of it move in the right direction. But you can make pockets of good things happen that start to build momentum over time.
>
> *—High school principal*

Other Contextual Factors

Contextual factors were those conditions or circumstances over which school administrators have little or no control. However, these factors often have a powerful influence on every aspect of the school—academics, discipline, social values, teacher motivation, and leadership. We

found three major contextual factors relevant to including students with disabilities in standards were community attitudes, school size, and class size and a diverse student body.

Community Attitudes

Often attitudes of small businesses and fast-food employers discount the value of a high school graduation. One high school principal told stories about students with disabilities being exploited by employers offering the minimum wage and encouraging students to quit high school. He attributed this attitude to restrictive educational placements for students with disabilities. The principal believed that these placements often provided a protective wall around the student:

> In the resource room we could keep the student happy, but sometimes still ignorant. But in the general classroom they're learning more, but they're more prone to frustration. You get a frustrated high school kid and a guy comes along and offers you a job, they're more easily stolen away.
>
> *—High school principal*

School Size

Issues in both large, urban schools and small, rural high schools impact the way teachers function and communicate, course offerings, and actions necessary for change. A large school inhibited the ability of teachers and groups in the school to communicate, collaborate, and come to a strategic consensus about needed change.

> The school has nearly 2,000 students. The size of the school makes it more difficult to foster communication and build a cohesive schoolwide faculty that embraces a shared vision for all students, and to hold common expectations for all teachers.
>
> *—High school principal*

Class Size and a Diverse Student Body

In many of our study schools, the average class size ranged from 30-38 students. These classes often included students with diverse learning needs, language use, and cultural backgrounds, including an increasing number of students with disabilities. The class sizes contribute to many believing that students with disabilities are better served in smaller, self-contained classrooms.

> A big problem is that we have 35 kids in the class. They each need individual attention, and there's no way I can give it to them when I have so many kids. It's all an issue of enrollment. We could do a damn good job if we didn't have that many. The kids with disabilities can get that attention in smaller special education classes, but they fall through the cracks in a regular class because we have too many kids.
>
> *—General education teacher*

Increasing diversity among students, including a large population for whom English was a second language, was described as another complicating factor when combined with large class size. This was a dominating issue with an overbearing influence on all aspects and questions of school life in highly diverse schools. A diverse student population was perceived as having different levels of preparation to succeed academically. Teachers claim that students from different cultures come to school with different goals and experience different social conditions outside of school. Additionally, educating a large, diverse population may shift attention from students with disabilities. Teachers reported that using a standards-based curriculum as a guide for teaching was an even greater challenge, given the high degree of diversity in their classrooms.

> In our classroom, students are at so many different levels. Applying the standards to the class as a whole is a challenge. You're dealing with higher-end students, then with students who have just come to the country and are learning how to speak English. Getting them all to learn standards is a challenge.
>
> —*General education teacher*

To cope with the pressures of student diversity, administrators in one large urban school strategically created an organizational structure in the school that provided instruction for all student groups, while holding them to common standards. The school formed interdepartmental houses for students and faculty with common interests, including a magnet school for advanced technology. Additionally, a strong bilingual program offered instruction for the large Latino population in the school, and a self-contained program served students with disabilities. In essence this campus housed four or five different schools. Thus, attempting to provide an instructional program for all students actually segregated the various special populations.

This chapter discussed the findings that emerged from the data collection activities. Quotes from teachers and administrators portray challenges related to including students with disabilities in standards-based reform initiatives. Moreover, the narrative presented larger issues confronted by teachers and administrators on a daily basis in high schools across the country. The issues are not specific to students with disabilities or others with special needs. Rather, this chapter illustrates the complexity of challenging the status quo and making high schools a thoughtful place to educate young adults.

Chapter 4

Recommendations

This section provides recommendations for state boards of education, policymakers, administrators, and university researchers to consider. It is important to maintain high expectations for students with disabilities. This must be balanced with providing the students with equal access to a standards-based curriculum. The recommendations provide guidelines that will help states, districts, and schools ensure that students with disabilities effectively participate in the standards-based curriculum.

Recommendation 1: The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) should be the tool for negotiating, reconciling, and determining the supports needed by students with disabilities to participate in a standards-based curriculum and the assessments that measure mastery of the curriculum.

Recommendation 2: To maximize the IEP as a vehicle for aligning student needs with a standards-based curriculum, states and districts should develop a decision matrix. The matrix will provide IEP teams, which include parents, with criteria to negotiate, reconcile, and determine the supports needed by students with disabilities to participate in a standards-based curriculum and related assessments.

Recommendation 3: Undergraduate and graduate training programs for general education teachers at all levels should include the philosophy of inclusion, and the pedagogical knowledge and strategies for teaching students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum.

Recommendation 4: An ongoing series of professional development activities should support the capacity of both general and special education teachers to integrate standards with curricula, develop activities and assessments that prepare students for large-scale assessments, and design accommodations and modifications for all students to maximize their participation in a standards-based curriculum. Additionally, the professional development activities should be school-based and facilitated by professionals based at the school who have assumed either formal or informal leadership roles in various reform initiatives. School-based professional development activities would ensure that both general and special educators participate and will serve to create a community of learners with a similar vision. Other recommendations for professional development activities include providing numerous, ongoing opportunities for teachers and administrators to a) reflect on and evaluate

both school and classroom practices, b) engage in interdepartmental study groups, and c) design and maintain interdepartmental strategic planning teams.

Recommendation 5: Districts should experiment with models for organizing high schools as interdepartmental/interdisciplinary structures that bring general and special education teachers together. Special education teachers should be assigned to general education departments and encouraged to participate in all departmental activities side-by-side with their general education colleagues.

Recommendation 6: Teacher training institutions and state certification boards should consider certification for secondary special education teachers that includes content-specific course work and knowledge necessary for a standards-based environment. This will facilitate a) discussions and teaming arrangements with general education staff, and b) access for students with disabilities to a standards-based curriculum. These content requirements would supplement the interdisciplinary nature of education and provide special educators the credibility to work with general educators as collaborative partners to benefit students with disabilities.

Recommendation 7: Central office and school-based administrators should strive for credibility as instructional leaders who understand the academic challenges of including all students, including those with disabilities, in a standards-based curriculum. Additionally, the administrators should develop a vision that includes high learning expectations for students with disabilities. This vision should be consistently communicated and promoted through curriculum offerings, grading policies, staffing patterns, resource allocations, informal and formal award structures, moral support, and opportunities and time for both general and special education teachers to discuss and reflect on issues related to standards and students with disabilities.

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Other special education publications available from the Center for Policy Research include:

Reform for EVERY Learner: Teachers' Views on Standards and Students with Disabilities. Based on research interviews with teachers in school systems across the country, this report highlights a number of themes significant to understanding the impact of the standards movement on students with disabilities, including teacher ownership and knowledge of standards-based reform, creating the conditions for student access to reforms, and the tension between allowing time to learn foundational skills and pushing onward in pursuit of standards-based learning. (2000, 32 pp., $10.00)

What Will It Take? Standards-Based Education Reform for ALL Students. This report raises important questions about whether recent efforts to improve the education system will, in fact, raise educational achievement for all the diverse populations of children in schools. A clear explanation of the nature of education reform, how it is being carried out in the states, and the involvement of the special education community in this work is included. (1996, 30 pp., $10.00)

The Push and Pull of Standards-Based Reform: How Does It Affect Local School Districts and Students with Disabilities? Based on research conducted in eight school districts across four states, this report examines how these districts have responded to state-initiated standards-based reforms, both in terms of general and special education. It particularly focuses on the variability of the responses as they affect students with disabilities, including differences in such areas as how inclusion is defined, grading practices for students with disabilities, graduation requirements, and policies for including students with "low incidence" or "high incidence" disabilities. (1998, 48 pp., $12.00)

Snapshots of Reform: How Five Local Districts Are Interpreting Standards-Based Reform for Students with Disabilities. This summary of a three-year study of reform efforts in five districts includes investigations into how the districts implemented policies on standards, assessments and accountability systems, parent and community involvement, and teacher development—and particularly looks at how these reforms affected students with disabilities. (1998, 20 pp., $7.50)

Reaching for the Sky: Technology Policies to Support the Achievement of Students with Disabilities. This guide combines the latest research findings and policy analysis to help state and local education leaders ensure that technology is effectively being used as a tool for improving children's learning, especially for children with disabilities. It contains research-based information on types of technology, ways technology can be used to enhance learning, funding policies, guidelines for assessing existing technology plans, and resources for more information. (1999, 47 pp., $14.00)

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